PROMETHEA
ALAN MOORE · J.H. WILLIAMS III · MICK GRAY · TODD KLEIN
IF SHE DID NOT EXIST, WE WOULD HAVE TO INVENT HER
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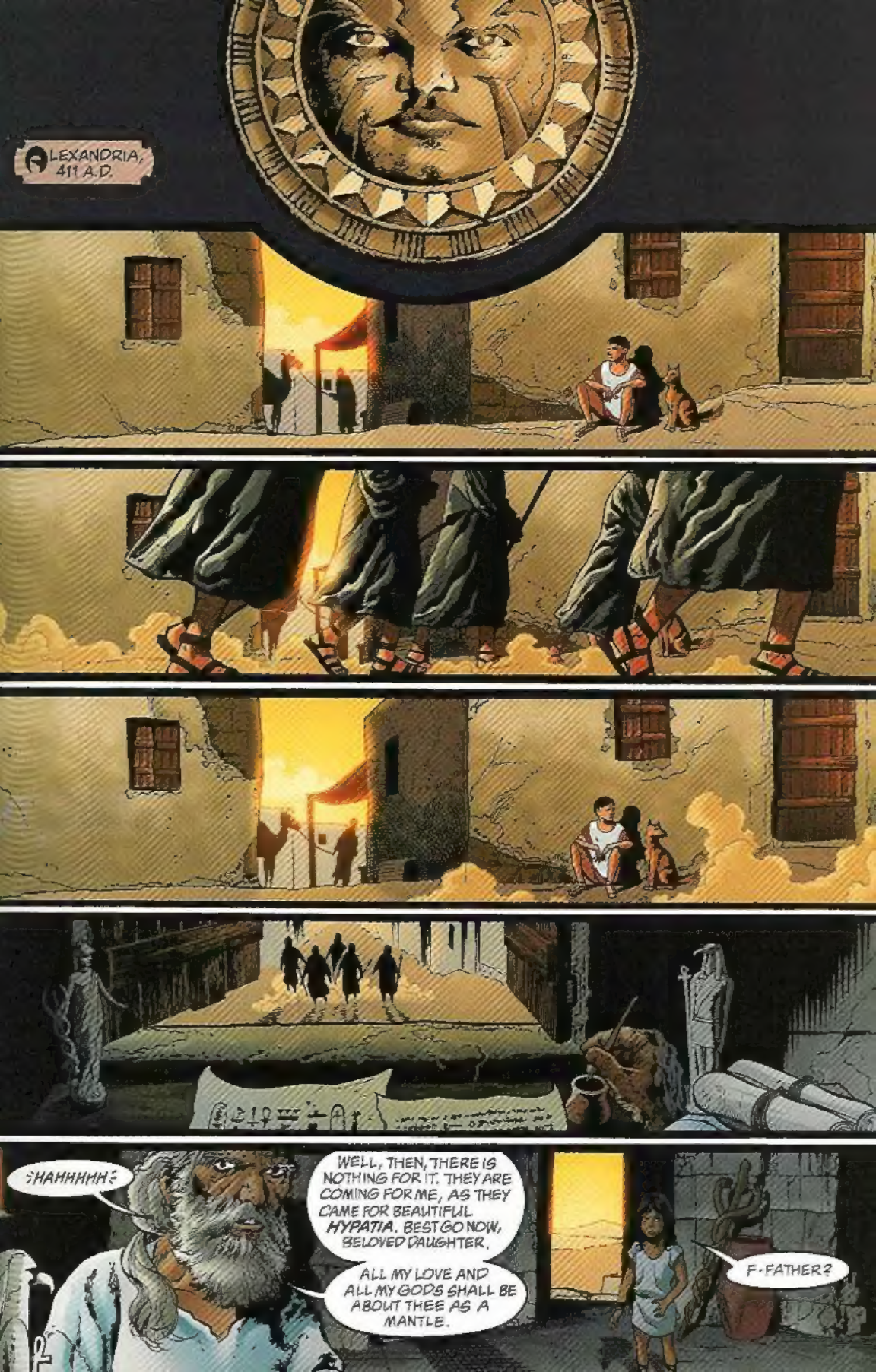
ALEXANDRIA, 411 A.D.
;HAHHHHH;
WELL, THEN, THERE IS NOTHING FOR IT. THEY ARE COMING FOR ME, AS THEY CAME FOR BEAUTIFUL HYPATIA. BEST GO NOW, BELOVED DAUGHTER.
ALL MY LOVE AND ALL MY GODS SHALL BE ABOUT THEE AS A MANTLE.
F-FATHER?

FATHER, YOU WILL BE KILLED, I KNOW IT! OH FATHER. OH NO. OH NO...
BE STRONG, CHILD. WE SHALL SEE EACH OTHER IN THE WESTERN LANDS, A-AND...
GO. GO NOW, MY LOVE, OR I SHALL WEAKEN.
GO.
COME OUT, DEVIL-WORSHIPPER!
COME OUT AND FACE US!
"HE IS PLAYING SOME TRICK. MY THOUGHTS ARE ALL QUEER."
"NO! WE... WE MUST IGNORE HIS BEWITCHMENTS. LET'S DO WHAT WE CAME HERE FOR."

HE... HE IS PLAYING SOME TRICK! MY THOUGHTS ARE ALL QUEER!
NO! WE...WE MUST IGNORE HIS BEWITCHMENTS! LET'S DO WHAT WE CAME HERE FOR!
"IN CHRIST'S NAME MAKE HIM STOP. I'M GOING TO BE SICK."
"TAKE THAT, DEVIL. OUR THOUGHTS ARE OUR OWN."
IN CHRIST'S NAME MAKE HIM STOP! I- I'M GOING TO BE SICK...
T-TAKE THAT, DEVIL! OUR...OUR THOUGHTS ARE OUR OWN!
"AGAIN. AGAIN. DEAR GOD, LET THIS BE DONE WITH. SEE, HE IS YET SMILING."
"THERE. TIME CLAIMS HIM. TIME, AND THE RADIANT, HEAVENLY CITY."
HURRRK...
AGAIN! AGAIN! DEAR GOD, LET THIS BE DONE WITH!
S-SEE! HE IS YET SMILING!
TH-THERE...
T-TIME CLAIMS HIM. TIME...
...AND THE RADIANT, HEAVENLY CITY.

NEW YORK, 1999 A.D.
YOU WANT DROPPING OFF WHERE? SO-PHEEE! NOT ANOTHER INTERVIEW FOR YOUR TERM PAPER! I HAD MINE FINISHED, LIKE, WEEKS AGO. YOU ARE TOTALLY GAY.
YEAH, WELL, YOU'RE FAT. IF MY TERM PAPER WAS A DISCOURSE ON WEEPING GORILLA, I'D HAVE FINISHED WEEKS AGO TOO!
OH, YOU SLUT! WEEPING GORILLA IS COMPLETELY THE BEST! I MEAN, WHAT WAS YOUR PAPER ON AGAIN? "PROSTITUTIA"? "PROSTHETICA"?
THE HOUSE
NUKOLA
UNDER THE BRIDGE DINER
CAB

PROMETHEA

The Radiant, Heavenly City

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PROMETHEA. THE SAME NAME TURNS UP IN 18th CENTURY POEMS, EARLY NEWSPAPER STRIPS, PULP MAGAZINES AND COMIC BOOKS. THAT'S INTERESTING! WEEPING GORILLA'S JUST POINTLESS!
THERE IS NO POINT! THAT IS THE GENIUS OF WEEPING GORILLA.
SO, WHO ARE YOU INTERVIEWING?
Weeping Gorilla
$2.25
I CAN'TE MOVEEN LIKE MALES ME FEEL SO ALONE!
HER NAME'S BARBARA SHELLEY. SHE'S THE WIDOW OF THE LAST GUY WHO WROTE THE PROMETHEA COMIC BOOK.
ACTUALLY, HER ADDRESS IS RIGHT NEAR HERE IF YOU WANT TO DROP ME OFF...
HEY, GUYZ HERE WILL BE FINE. THEN YOU CAN RUN ME OVER TO ST. MARK'S PLACE.
YOU'RE GOING TO THE LIMP GIG, HUH?
Y'KNOW, STACIA, THIS SHELLEY WOMAN SOUNDED LIKE SORT OF A BITCH ON THE PHONE. GIVEN THE CHOICE, I'D RATHER BE OUT WITH YOU TONIGHT.
AAH, YOU WANT MY BODY, YOU HOMO. ADMIT IT.
LISTEN, I'LL SEE YOU IN COLLEGE TOMORROW. GOOD LUCK FINDING OUT ABOUT PROLAPSIA!
View Apartments
ELASTAGEL
BRAY
PROMETHEA.
PROMETHEA CREATED BY
ALAN MOORE & J.H. WILLIAMS III

POLICE
MRS. SHELLEY? HI, I'M SOPHIE BANGS. I CALLED LAST WEEK ABOUT MY PAPER ON PROMETHEA?
OH. YOU BETTER COME IN.
THANKS FOR SEEING ME. YOU MUST GET LOTS OF PEOPLE ASKING ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND'S WORK.
NO. NOBODY. THAT'S WHY I FIGURES I'D BETTER CHECK YOU OUT.
LISTEN, WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN PROMETHEA? ON THE PHONE YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT FOLKLORE...
RIGHT. SEE, THE NAME PROMETHEA GOES WAY BACK. SHE'S FIRST MENTIONED IN THIS POEM, "A FAERIE ROMANCE," WRITTEN BY SOMEONE CALLED CHARLTON SENNET IN 1780.
UH, SHE'S NOT A WARRIOR IN THE POEM. SHE'S THIS FAIRY HANDMAIDEN.
MM-HMM.
AND THEN WHAT?
WELL, THEN IN 1901, THE HEARST SYNDICATE RUNS THIS NEWSPAPER STRIP, LITTLE MARGIE IN MISTY MAGIC LAND BY MARGARET TAYLOR CASE.
MARGIE HAS THIS SORT OF FAIRY COMPANION NAMED PROMETHEA.
SO THERE'S A COINCIDENCE ABOUT THE NAME. HOW'S THIS FOLKLORE?
YEAH, BUT, SEE, LITTLE MARGIE RAN UNTIL 1920.
NOW, DURING WORLD WAR ONE, A POPULAR STORY AROSE IN THE TRENCHES ABOUT A WARRIOR ANGEL APPEARING TO SOLDIERS IN NEED.
SHE CALLED HERSELF PROMETHEA...
AA, HALF THOSE GUYS HAD SHELL-SHOCK.

WAIT, IT GETS WEIRDER. IN 1924, THIS PULP MAGAZINE, ASTONISHING STORIES, RUNS A SERIES: "PROMETHEA, WARRIOR QUEEN OF HY BRASIL."
THIS PROMETHEA RULES A SCIENCE-FANTASY LOST CONTINENT. A WOMAN CALLED GRACE BRANNAGH DOES SOME GREAT COVERS...
LISTEN, WHERE'S ALL THIS GOING?
ASTONISHING STORIES FOLDS, 1938. THE PUBLISHER'S BOUGHT BY A COMPANY WHO TURN PROMETHEA INTO A SCIENCE-HERO COMIC.
THIS GUY WILLIAM WOOLCOTT WRITES IT UNTIL 1970, WHEN YOUR LATE HUSBAND TAKES OVER.
MEANWHILE, THERE'S ALL THESE URBAN LEGENDS ABOUT PEOPLE MEETING PROMETHEA...
MISS BANGS...
LOOK, I'VE BEEN HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS INTERVIEW. IT'S LATE, AND I'M SUDDENLY REAL TIRED.
IF I WAS YOU, I'D DROP THIS WHOLE PROMETHEA THING RIGHT NOW. IT'S A NOTHING IDEA, Y'KNOW? NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME...
HUH? B-BUT MY TERM PAPER...
LISTEN, KID, YOU TAKE MY ADVICE. YOU DON'T WANNA GO LOOKING FOR FOLKLORE.
AND YOU ESPECIALLY DON'T WANT FOLKLORE TO COME LOOKING FOR YOU.
I DON'T BELIEVE IT.
JUST LIKE THAT.
OUT IN THE COLD.

ALEXANDRIA, 411 A.D.
FATHER?
F-FATHER, IT'S GETTING DARK, AND I'M SCARED.
FATHER?
FATHER, PLEASE DON'T BE DEAD. PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE.
I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO. I...
WHURRR...

:MMHMH.:
:MMHMHMH-HMHMHMH.:
DADDY?
DADDY, YOU SAID. YOU SAID I'D BE ALL RIGHT.
:MMHMHMHMHMH.:
I'M ALL ON MY OWN, DADDY.
PLEASE SAVE ME.
YOU SAID THERE'D BE GODS. YOU SAID THEY'D LOOK AFTER ME.
YOU PROMISED, DADDY. YOU...
...PROMISED...

NEW YORK, 999 A.D.
AOW!
HA HA! SORRY IF WE STARTLED YOU THERE, YOUNG LADY. PLEASE DON'T BE ALARMED. THIS IS PURELY ROUTINE.
YOU MAY RECOGNIZE US. WE'RE NEW YORK'S RESIDENT SCIENCE-HEROES, THE FIVE SWELL GUYS, AND WE'RE JUST OUT ON PATROL, AS USUAL.
KENNETH HERE HAD ONE OF HIS PSYCHIC FLASHES ABOUT YOU. YOU'RE NOT BEING MENACED BY STRANGE, OVERWHELMING FORCES, BY ANY CHANCE?
UH... NO. WELL, I'M HAVING A LOT OF PROBLEMS WITH COMPLETING MY TERM PAPER, BUT, Y'KNOW. THAT'S ALL.
HMM. SO NO EXTRATERRESTRIAL CREATURES BOTHERING YOU? NO GOVERNMENT CONSPIRACIES, ANCIENT DEMON CULTS, NOTHING LIKE THAT?
UH-UH. THIS INTERVIEW I WAS DOING DIDN'T WORK OUT, SO I WAS HEADED OVER TO ST. MARK'S PLACE TO SEE THIS ENGLISH BAND, THE LIMP?
KENNETH, YOU'VE BEEN A LITTLE "OFF" SINCE YOUR DIVORCE...

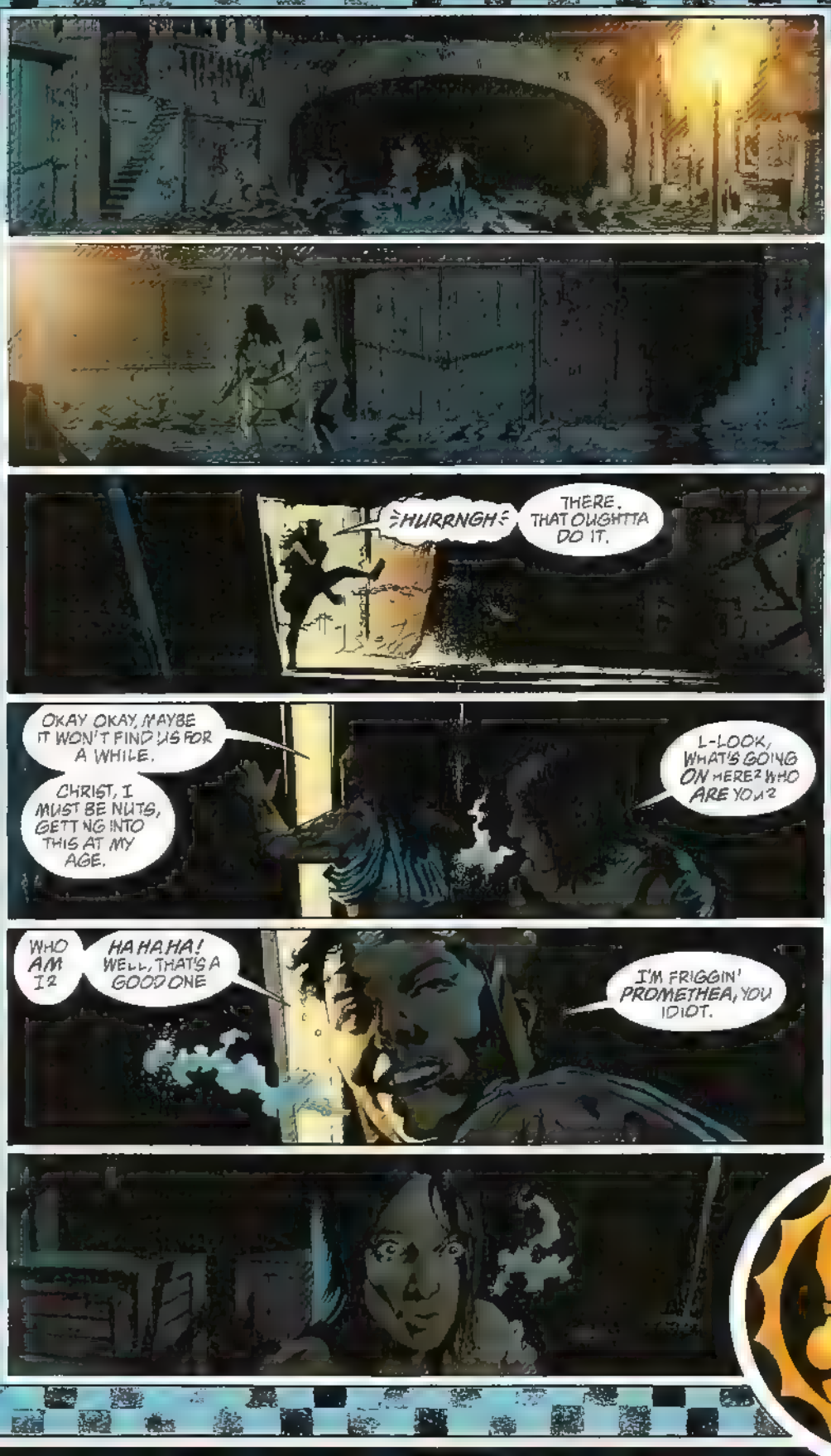
HECK. Y-YOU KNOW. I FELT SO SURE...
COME ON, KENNETH YOU WERE SURE THAT BETTY WASN'T SLEEPING WITH HER AEROBICS INSTRUCTOR, TOO.
UH, SURE. NO PROBLEM 'BYE.
WE'RE SORRY TO HAVE BOTHERED YOU, MISS GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR TERM PAPER.
WOW
"FIVE SWELL GUYS"
WAIT TILL I TELL STACIA.
SHE'LL HEMORRHAGE

H-HELLO?
Hello.
AAAA!
OH GOD, JESUS, MOM, BUDDHA ..
AAAA!
AAAAA

GHAAAH!
WHOHH..
Weeping Gorilla
GO ON, ASK ME ABOUT MY HARD ADS
COMIX
APEX
CLIMB UP! CLIMB UP ME ONTO THE BRIDGE, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE! YOU THINK I CAN HANG ON HERE ALL DAY?
N-NO. I MEAN, OKAY I'M CLIMB-ING...
COME ON, HURRY! THAT SMEE IS GONNA BE ALL OVER US!
PLEASE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPEN-ING, WHAT'S A--
--SMEE?
>HUFFF< DON'T WORRY
>HUFFF< DON'T WORRY, I'M ON IT
OKAY
OKAY, YOU CREEPY SON OF A BITCH, COME ON! COME ON, I DARE YA!
N-NO. NO, DON'T...

URRNK...
GROOFF
Fat SOW!
JESUS...
Open you...like a FISH...
AAOW!
OH GOD! LEAVE HER ALONE! YOU'LL KILL HER!
NO HE WON'T.
ARRNG!
Oh yes I w

WOW
YOU KILLED IT
THE SMEE? DON'T BE STUPID. IT'S JUST WINDED.
COME ON LET'S GET OUT OF HERE
WH-WHERE ARE WE GOING?
WELL, I DON'T KNOW! JUST SOMEWHERE WE CAN HIDE UP AND DELAY THE INEVITABLE.
JEEZ, THAT THING CUT ME GOOD
OW


=HURRNGH=
THERE. THAT OUGHTTA DO IT.
OKAY OKAY, MAYBE IT WON'T FIND US FOR A WHILE.
CHRIST, I MUST BE NUTS, GETTING INTO THIS AT MY AGE.
L-LOOK, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? WHO ARE YOU?
WHO AM I?
HA HA HA! WELL, THAT'S A GOOD ONE
I'M FRIGGIN' PROMETHEA, YOU IDIOT.

ALEXANDRIA, 411 A.D.
DON'T BE AFRAID.
YOU WERE LOST, BUT NOW YOU ARE FOUND.
NOW EVERYTHING IS WELL.

A-ARE YOU...?
ARE YOU ONE OF MY FATHER'S GODS, COME TO KEEP ME SAFE?
NO. I AM TWO OF YOUR FATHER'S GODS. I AM THOTH-HERMES...
...AND I CANNOT KEEP YOU SAFE. NOT IN THIS PRESENT WORLD.
WHY NOT?
OUR INFLUENCE HERE IS WANING, OUR PRIESTS SLAIN BY THOSE OF THE NEW GOD. A DARK AGE IS COMING.
ONLY IN MY WORLD, THE IMMATERIA, CAN I PROTECT YOU... AND THERE YOU WOULD NO LONGER BE A LITTLE GIRL.
YOU'D BE A STORY.
W-WOULD I STILL BE ALIVE? WOULD I BE ABLE TO COME BACK AND VISIT THIS WORLD?
YOU WOULD LIVE ETERNALLY, AS STORIES DO.
AS FOR COMING BACK, WELL...
SOMETIMES, IF A STORY IS VERY SPECIAL, IT CAN QUITE TAKE PEOPLE OVER.
WE'LL SEE.
COME ALONG
IS YOUR WORLD VERY FAR?
NO. IT IS ALWAYS IN THE PLACE WHERE YOU ARE STANDING.
TELL ME, CHILD, WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
PROMETHEA.

"SEE, PROMETHEA WAS A REAL LITTLE GIRL WHO LIVED IN 5th CENTURY ROMAN EGYPT. HER FATHER WAS A HERMETIC SCHOLAR, SORT OF LIKE A MAGICIAN.
A CHRISTIAN MOB KILLED HIM... NOT UNCOMMON BACK THEN... BUT THE GODS INTERVENED, TAKING HIS DAUGHTER INTO THEIR WORLD OF MYTH AND FICTION, THE IMMATERIA.
"PROMETHEA BECAME A LIVING STORY, GROWING UP IN THE REALM THAT ALL DREAMS AND STORIES COME FROM. SOMETIMES, SHE'D WANDER INTO THE IMAGINATION OF MORTALS
"CHARLTON SENNET, THE POET MARGARET CASE, THE CARTOONIST AND GRACE BRANNAGH, THE ILLUSTRATOR. COMICS ARTIST WILLIAM WOOLCOTT AND WRITER STEVE SHELLEY THEY CHANNELLED PROMETHEA!
"SOME OF THEM, TAKEN OVER BY THIS POWERFUL LIVING IDEA, EVEN PHYSICALLY BECAME PROMETHEA... EITHER THEM, OR LOVED ONES THAT THEY PROJECTED HER IDENTITY ONTO.
MARGARET CASE, FOR EXAMPLE, BECAME PROMETHEA TO HELP OUT IN THE TRENCHES OF WORLD WAR ONE. DURING THE '20s AND '30s, GRACE BRANNAGH TOOK OVER
"SEE, ANYONE WITH IMAGINATION AND ENOUGH ENTHUSIASM FOR THE CHARACTER CAN BRING HER THROUGH FROM THE IMMATERIA, BY THINKING THEMSELVES OR OTHERS INTO THE ROLE.
"DURING THE '70s, CHARLTON SENNET'S HOUSEMAID, ANNA, BECAME HIS DREAM-LOVER PROMETHEA TRANSFORMED BY THE POET'S IMAGINATION AS HE WROTE A FAERIE ROMANCE FOR HER
"STEVE SHELLEY DID THE SAME THING..."
...ONLY WITH HIS WIFE

OH MY GOD
YOU'RE THE WOMAN I TRIED TO INTERVIEW.
YOU'RE BARBARA SHELLEY.
KID, I PRAY TO GOD YOU'RE NOT AS DUMB AS YOU ACT.
YEAH, I'M BARBARA SHELLEY. GUESS IT'S SHOWING. CAN'T MAINTAIN THE FORM, Y'KNOW?
SEE, IT WAS MY STEVE HAD THE IMAGINATION. HE DIED, '91.
SINCE THEN, PROMETHEA'S BEEN GETTING MORE LIKE ME. CAN'T IMAGINE HER ANY DIFFERENT.
Y-YOU CHANGED BACK.
BOY, YOU'RE SHARP AS A TACK, AIN'T YA?
I CAN'T BELIEVE WHOEVER SENT THAT SMEE TH,NKS YOU'RE THE NEXT PROMETHEA.
M-ME?
WELL, AIN'T IT OBVIOUS? THEY MUST HAVE SENSED IT SOON AS SOMEBODY EVEN BECAME INTERESTED IN PROMETHEA.
I TOLD YA YOUGHTTA DROP IT.
BUT, I CAN'T BE PROMETHEA.
WE'D BETTER HOPE OTHERWISE. WE MAYBE GOT HALF AN HOUR BEFORE THAT SMEE FINDS US
DO YOU WRITE?
UH WELL, ESSAYS AND POETRY AND STUFF, BUT...
TAKE THIS. GO FIND SOMEWHERE QUIET AND WRITE ABOUT PROMETHEA A DESCRIPTION, A POEM...
ANYTHING
AND DO IT QUICK. A SMEE IS A SEMI-MINDLESS ELEMENTAL ENTITY.
IT'LL PROBABLY RAPE, KILL AND DISEMBOWEL US
MAYBE EVEN IN THAT ORDER.
OH, AND TRY TO RELAX.

Her name was Prometheus, thrust
I am Prometheus
and take my name
From he bound to a rock and plagued by birds.
In me burns his Celestial stolen flame
I am the words made flesh, the flesh made words
I am Prometheus
my father, slain dead,
Martyred, his bones daubed red with.
Heresy
By those who would turn Gold back into
Lead
And sour a world with by their sour
Alchemy.
I am Prometheus,
God-adopted one
Reared on their sacred unnatural hills and vales
My stout take is in the world of substance spun,
Yet is my substance in the world of tales.

I am Promethea
the child who stands
Between lyred earth and insubstantial air,
A dream thought who yet treads matters
ram-swept strands,
And mortals are the sandals that I wear
I am Promethea
From Mind's pure light
I stoop into Earth's dark gloom
From Fable's day
Descending into Fact's cold
ice-night
From lyric atmospheres to
Mammal clay
I am Promethea
the rumored one
The Mythic bough that Reason
strains to wield.
I am that so once left once the
Book is done..

I am the dream that wakens does not end.
OAAH!
I told you I'd kill you.
Where's the girl?
YOU RE WRONG ABOUT HER WHOEVER'S TALKING.
SHE'S NOT THE ONE SHE JUST DOESN'T HAVE IT, LEAVE HER BE!

Not what I asked.
Where is she?
AAAA! WHO SENT YOU? I-IS IT THE TEMPLE? IS IT JACK FAUST OR THE NIGHT QUEEN?
OH GOD, I'M TELLING YOU, THE GIRL'S NOT THE ONE! SHE'S SOME USELESS KID! SHE'S NO-BODY!
SHE'S--
I AM PROMETHEA, ART'S FIERCEST SPARK...
...I AM ALL INSPIRATION...
...ALL DESIRE.
AW, GOD, AW JEEZ...
IMAGINATION'S BLAZE IN MANKIND'S DARK...
I AM PROMETHEA...

I BRING YOU FIRE!
MURRRHEEE EEEEEEEEEEE EEEEEKHH!!

Oh.
I'm too late, then?
YES
WAAARRRGH!
MUCH TOO LITTLE...
...eerrnk...
...eerrngh...

...AND MUCH TOO LATE.
FREEEE

BARBARA...I MUST GET YOU TO A HOSPITAL...
Y-YOU WERE INCREDIBLE. YOU WERE BETTER THAN I EVER WAS.
HELL, YOU WERE BETTER THAN GRACE BRANNAGH.
YOU'VE LOST A LOT OF BLOOD. DON'T TRY TO TALK.
B-BUT I GOT SO MUCH I HAVE TO TELL YOU. THERE'S SO MUCH YOU NEED TO KNOW...
YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR PREDECESSORS, MARGIE CASE AND POOR BILL WOOLCOTT AND THE REST.
YOU NEED TO KNOW YOUR ENEMIES. I-IT WAS PROBABLY THE TEMPLE SENT THAT SMEE.
THEN THERE'S THE IMMATERIA...
HUSH, BARBARA. THERE'LL BE TIME TO TELL ME LATER, WHEN YOU'RE WELL.
NOW THAT I'M BACK, I HAVE ALL THE TIME THAT THERE IS IN THE WORLD.
TIME...

...AND THE RADIANT, HEAVENLY CITY.
MOORE'S HOUSE OF MAGIC
NEXT: The Judgment of Solomon

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PROMETHEA™

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THE PROMETHEA PUZZLE:
An Adventure in Folklore

"Then to that diamond-beaded glade there came
A pageant throng of sweet imaginings,
Of Faeries, Imps and creatures without name,
A great frenetic bustling of wings.
About their Queen four nymphs-in-waiting stood
Girded in armour, each of beauty rare:
Cowslip, and Flax, and Jenny-in-the-Wood,
And sweet Promethea, with her plaited hair."

With these lines, some fifty stanzas into his epic sentimental fantasy *A Faerie Romance*, New England poet Charlton Sennet (1751–1803) makes the first mention of a character who has since then evolved into a fascinating literary mystery in her own right. Promethea, a handmaiden "with skin like polished betel-wood," is introduced as one of four handmaidens to the Faerie Queen Titania (a straight crib from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to which it seems Sennet originally intended his own poem as a tribute), but within a dozen or so stanzas seems to have completely taken over both the entire poem and the poet's imagination.

What starts out as an idyll with Titania and her faerie entourage at play in some Arcadian backwater of the natural world is quickly sidetracked into a long narrative that details an intense and (for the period) passionate romance between the nymph Promethea and "a mortal shepherd lad, with moon-calf eyes," in whose poetic nature one suspects Sennet intended an extremely flattering depiction of himself. Sennet, from such few descriptions of him as exist, appears as a somewhat unpleasant man whose wife left him abruptly when she learned he had seduced a simple-minded servant girl in their employ. From there, the tale becomes more grim and sordid still: pregnant with Sennet's child, the servant died in labor, with attendant circumstances that led some to suspect Sennet of contributing to the demise of both the mother and her infant, although nothing of any substance could every be proven. After this distressing episode, Sennet would seem to have sunk into a deep depression, ending only with the poet's death from liver failure at the relatively early age of fifty-two years old.

All this is a far cry from the moonstruck and sensitive young shepherd/poet that's described in Sennet's narrative, and yet one can't escape the feeling that in the unblemished innocence of his male lead, hopelessly in love with an immortal being from the Land of Faerie, Sennet was describing himself as he *wished* he'd been. His poem, over-long and often plodding in its rhythm, can almost be seen as a protracted and idyllic sexual fantasy in which Sennet sought solace from the bitter circumstances of real life.

While hardly shocking to a modern audience, verses in which Sennet describes his faerie-lover's "tawny belly, downed as soft as peach" were seen as semi-pornographic by Sennet's already limited contemporary readership. (Interestingly, when Sennet's notebooks were discovered long after his death, it became apparent that Sennet had already censored himself heavily by removing verses in which the erotic content was uncomfortably explicit, even by today's more lenient standards.) As a result of this perhaps unfairly scandalous reputation, very few of the privately printed copies of *A Faerie Romance* ever made it into public circulation. That the poem survives at all is solely due to a modest revival of interest in Sennet's work during the 1920s.

The fact that in the first years of the twentieth century both Sennet and his work were in effect unknown makes the next incarnation of Promethea something of a puzzle to the modern literary historian. In 1901, in the Sunday color section of William Randolph Hearst's *New York Clarion*, a comic strip both drawn and written by the artist Margaret Taylor Case commenced a lengthy run that lasted until Case retired in 1920. *Little Margie in Misty Magic Land*, the strip in question, was a sometimes-saccharine but, more often, genuinely charming and inventive fantasy about a little girl called Margie and her strange adventures in the daydream world of her imagination, the Misty Magic Land of the strip's title. Here, she would encounter fairies, centaurs, ancient gods and characters from folklore, such as in the memorable extended serial which depicted Margie helping to depose a Jack (of Beanstalk fame) who'd grown tyrannical and taken over the enormous Beanstalk-kingdom previously inhabited by giants. Sequences including Margie trapped inside a giantess's sewing-basket with its monstrous cotton reels and tape-measures showed off Margaret Case's deft ability at conjuring a dream-like atmosphere by playing with the size and scale of things and made her comic strip a minor legend in its field, still studied by *aficionados* of the field today.

Case claimed that Little Margie was in fact herself when she had been a child, and that the infant's curious adventures (in quaintly named regions of Misty Magic Land such as The Splendid Strand of Yawn, or Dogworm's Fuming Terrace) were no more than the cartoonist's childhood wanderings in the realm of fancy, transformed almost verbatim into comic strip. If this is so, then it would seem that Margaret Taylor Case was not aware of the Promethea in Charlton Sennet's poem when she introduced a character of the same name and of a very similar nature to her cast of cartoon players in the fall of 1923. While lost in Baron Fireglove's Chuckling Orchard, Margie is eventually rescued by a brace of characters that would remain as her companions for almost the rest of her newspaper strip's duration.

These were a benign and often-motherly fairy princess named Promethea, and a regrettable comic-relief sidekick named Chinky the Chinese Imp. Chinky, a grotesque and demonic racial caricature complete with pigtail and gibberish dialogue ("Moo foo boo!"), while obviously offensive to contemporary audiences, was hardly out of keeping with the outlook of the times, in which racial minorities were cast, routinely, as degrading comic stooges and buffoons. Given that all of the character's pronouncements were in a nonsensical pseudo-Chinese, Chinky can never be said to have developed as a personality during his lengthy tenure in the strip. The same is not true of Promethea.

As Case depicted her, Promethea emerges as a brave, compassionate figure with what at times would seem an almost melancholy air about her. In her earliest appearances she patiently explains to Little Margie that she's had and lost a daughter of her own, and feels a great attachment and protectiveness to Margie as a direct consequence of this. There is even one sequence, puzzlingly out of character and never subsequently mentioned in any later episode, where Promethea grows angry and resentful of Little Margie's periodic returns to her natural family in the real, waking world: "Don't you think that I'd like to go there with you, now and then? I had a father once myself, you know, when I was a real little girl!" This bewildering outburst is never explained, never again referred to, but it serves to indicate the level of complexity and intrigue that Case brought to a supporting character with only a minor, secondary role to play.

Promethea's exit from the strip, some several months before Case opted for retirement in the May of 1920, is just as striking and as mystifying. Announcing that she's "tired of people and their warlike ways," she says farewell to Margie and embarks, Chinky in tow, upon a journey that she says

will lead her to a kingdom of her own. What kingdom this might be is not remarked upon, nor is it properly explained just how Promethea can have grown "tired of people and their warlike ways" when in the seventeen years of her stay in *Little Margie* she has seen no warfare and, other than Margie herself, very few examples of what might reasonably be called people. After Promethea's departure from the strip, much of the life, imagination and enthusiasm that Case had invested in the work seemed to have departed with her. Six months of pallid and lackluster stories followed before the cartoonist, sensing that the work had lost its magic, put away her brush and pen and settled for a retirement that was comfortable and uneventful.

After *Little Margie*'s end in 1920, the Promethea trail grows cold for a few years until the pulp boom of the 1920s, when again we find a character of that name and with certain common traits appearing in a serial narrative. Once more, it would appear as if the various creators who would engineer Promethea's next incarnation did so without knowledge of the work of Charlton Sennet or the secondary background character that had appeared in *Little Margie*, although obviously the latter cannot be entirely ruled out. This Promethea was the lead figure and the heroine of an occasional series of short fantasy novellas that appeared in the acclaimed pulp monthly *Astonishing Stories*, starting in the issue dated February, 1924.

Other than in her name and in some details of appearance, this Promethea is very different from her earlier namesakes, being both a fierce and amorous warrior queen constantly fighting to protect her lost fantasy land of Hy Brasil from various devilish and monstrous invaders all originating in the demon-haunted territories beyond the country's boundaries. In the first published tale, *A Warrior Queen of Hy Brasil*, we find the plucky outlander Promethea as she fights her way up from footsoldier to become the sovereign ruler of the vast and marvelous domain. Credited (as were all subsequent Promethea stories) to Marto Neptura, the tale portrays Promethea as a sexually knowing woman with a string of lovers in her past and a ferocious skill with swords and axes.

In fact, "Marto Neptura" was as nonexistent as Promethea herself, being merely an invented house-pseudonym under which a great number of nameless hack writers churned out what were usually (it must be said) both uninspired and uninspiring potboiler narratives of the "Spicy Fantasy" school. Here follows an example from *Promethea and the Manigators*, the eighth story in the series: "The rivulets of blood on her brown arms were like a scarlet lacework, fitfully illuminated in the staccato and infrequent dazzle of the lightning. With her firm breasts heaving, the beloved Queen of Hy Brasil forced her reptilian antagonist closer and closer to the chasm's edge. His terrifying jaws snapped tight together only inches from her face as, with the muscles standing out on her long, tawny legs, she heaved the alligator-creature past the precipice's edge and into the abyss below." Clearly, the fact that the Promethea tales as featured in *Astonishing* are still remembered fondly and are indeed quite collectable is not based on the literary merit of the stories. (Although it's interesting to observe that both the poet Charlton Sennet and the nameless author of the *Manigators* yarn describe Promethea's skin as brown or tawny.)

In actuality, the enduring popularity of Marto Neptura's Promethea had nothing to do with the mythical Mr. Neptura and everything to do with the legendary Grace Brannagh. Grace Brannagh, a pulp cover illustrator with a style that's been compared to near-contemporary Margaret Brundage, provided painted covers for some fifty issues of *Astonishing*. Included in these were all fifteen issues in which the lead story was a new *Promethea* novella, creating a firm bond in the reader's mind between the artist and the heroine. Given the pallid, characterless prose of the dozen or so writers who comprised "Marto Neptura," it hardly comes as a surprise that almost all the articles since written on Promethea in the science-fiction specialist press have focused on Grace Brannagh's contribution, leaving all the actual stories and their content virtually ignored.

Brannagh's Promethea (or, if you prefer, Neptura's) conceals a number of intriguing elements beneath a pulp veneer. The cover illustrations, in their luminous depictions of the continent of Hy Brasil, portray a world that's hauntingly surreal and alien, with shifting metamorphic rock formations that will sometimes look like centipedes or sometimes like trombones beneath a swirling emerald sky that never could have possibly existed on our world, for all that the interior narratives insist that "Hy Brasil" is a real continent in Earth's primordial past.

It turns out that the continent of Hy Brasil *was* once considered to be real, and is indeed depicted on the shipping maps of only a few hundred years ago. In fact, a probably-apocryphal account of the first landing by explorers on the coasts of South America suggests that these adventurers at first believed that they had landed on the mythical lost land, and only named their new-discovered country as Brazil because of this confusion between fact and fantasy.

The legendary Hy Brasil is a large Western island that in many ways would seem to correspond to Paradise or even Fairyland. Celtic mythology names Hy Brasil as *Tir na Nog*, the Faerie kingdom that Ireland's original semi-divine inhabitants departed to when they were driven from our world. Oddly, this almost brings us back to Charlton Sennet's vision of Promethea as hailing from the realm of fairies and of folklore.

In 1938, the publishers responsible for *Astonishing Stories* were bought out by a group called Apex Magazines who mostly published comic books. Combing through *Astonishing*'s inventory for characters they might successfully transfer to strip cartoons, Apex found few ideas with potential. Only Promethea seemed to have any possibilities, and so in 1941 the character's fourth incarnation made her debut as lead feature in Apex's *Smashing Comics*, later graduating to her own book, titled simply *Promethea* (1946).

This new Promethea, while loosely modeled on the character's pulp incarnation, was recast as a "science heroine" of the type in which the company specialized. Thus, Promethea now operates in contemporary America, fighting crooks, spies and the Nazi menace. She has an FBI man as a boyfriend ("Dirk Dangerfield at your service, Princess!"), and only returns to her other-dimensional kingdom of Hy Brasil for occasional adventures with mythical adversaries like Maat the Egyptian Vulture-Goddess or her minions. The artist/writer for these new adventures, working on the strip from 1941 until his tragic, violent death in 1970, was former Classics teacher William Woolcott. Woolcott was an intensely private man who many later feminist critics of comics have applauded (with some reservations) for the genuine female sensibility which he imparted in the character. Woolcott's death, in 1970, was sudden and bizarre. The artist was shot dead in his own apartment by a schizophrenic former FBI agent named Dennis Drucker who apparently believed that Woolcott's "Dirk Dangerfield" character had been based on him, and seemed to feel that the characterization undermined his masculinity in some way.

Following Woolcott's death in 1970, *Promethea* was handed to a young and radical new comic writer, Steven Shelley, for a revamp, ably assisted by a number of fine comic artists (including a memorable stint by artist P. Craig Russell in the early eighties). The most noticeable change that Shelley brought to Woolcott's character was to change her skin coloring back to the "polished betel-wood" of earlier incarnations from the firmly Caucasian flesh-pink of the forties through the sixties. This was almost certainly because, by Shelley's own admission, he was basing his Promethea upon his lovely and vivacious new wife Barbara, who was Hispanic. Shelley brought a great deal of intelligence and fondness for experiment to his depiction of the character, and his death from cancer in the spring of 1996 led to a suspension of the Apex comic series in a gesture practically unheard of in the comic industry. Cynics, of course, were quick to point out the declining sales of the title as the actual motive for its cancellation, as apparently it's well known that books with a female title character have never performed well in a male-oriented marketplace.

So today, Promethea is in limbo...or perhaps in Misty Magic Land....with her adventures no longer before the public. Given the current popularity of simplistic post-modern characters such as the inexplicably celebrated Weeping Gorilla, perhaps it is simply that times have moved on, and that there is no longer a place for the romantic fantasy and play of the imagination that Promethea represents. We can only hope that she is merely resting in some corner of the Realm of Faerie, or of Hy Brasil, and that at some point in the future she'll turn up in some new guise, some fresh twist to her puzzling history, a genuine piece of American folklore in action; of poetry in motion.

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